Biological Integrity
Integrating the Mind and Body

FACT SHEET: SOCIAL AFFIRMATION

September 2025

WHAT IS SOCIAL AFFIRMATION?

Social affirmation, in the context of a minor's sexual identity, involves supporting a child's or adolescent's identity when it is contrary to their biological sex by endorsing a change in name, pronoun use, hair style, and clothing to more closely match the child's perceived incongruent sexual identity.

Children uncomfortable with their biological sex will typically experience relief if not socially or medically affirmed.

Most children and adolescents with gender dysphoria will usually resolve those mental and emotional incongruencies after experiencing the normal developmental process of puberty.

- Desistance is the norm without affirmation as documented by Zucker in his article "The Myth of Persistence".[1]
- In the "largest sample to date of boys clinic-referred for gender dysphoria," there was a desistance rate of 87.8%.[2]
- The pro-affirmation Endocrine Society Guidelines (2017) admit: "...the GD/gender incongruence of a *minority* of prepubertal children appears to persist in adolescence."[3]
- A longitudinal study from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands followed 2772 adolescents (recruited from a psychiatric clinic) from age 11 years through 22 -26 years. "In early adolescence 11% of participants reported gender non-contentedness. The prevalence decreased with age and was 4% at the last follow-up (around age 26)."[4] Even in this psychiatric patient study group for which interventions were not addressed, but gender affirmation is most likely, gender "non-contentedness" (i.e. gender dysphoria/gender incongruence) decreased substantially from early adolescence to young adulthood.

Premature social affirmation is not recommended even by organizations that promote transgender identification:

- The American Psychological Association Handbook on Sexuality and Psychology states, "Premature labeling of gender identity should be

avoided. Early social transition (i.e. change of gender role…) should be approached with caution to avoid foreclosing this stage of (trans) gender identity development."[5]

Social affirmation impacts brain development:

- Humans are social beings with a need for social connection, so the brain is wired to assure decision making is influenced by an individual's social environment.
- Social conformity leads to feelings of pleasure in the reward system of the brain and becomes reinforcing.

Social affirmation by trusted adults is misleading for children:

- Children must learn how to differentiate reality from fantasy and do so by incorporating information from their environment and from trusted adults.
- Information presented to children in a scientific manner by a trusted adult is more likely to be viewed as reality, even if it is unscientific.

Social affirmation does not improve a child's mental well-being:

- A study by Wong, et al. of 226 gender-dysphoric children who had socially transitioned compared to those who had not transitioned concurred, with the authors stating, "There was little evidence that psychosocial well-being varied in relation to gender transition status."[6]
- Another systematic review of studies reporting on outcomes of social transition for children and adolescents was reported from the University of York in the United Kingdom. Only eleven studies were found and the researchers state "most were of low quality" with no prospective longitudinal studies available. The authors concluded, "Overall studies consistently reported no difference in mental health outcomes for children who socially transitioned across all comparators."[7]

Social affirmation is not a neutral intervention, but rather leads to persistence of gender dysphoria:

- When trusted adults confirm the gender dysphoria of a child, it is much more likely that the child will persist with gender dysphoria. A study of 127 adolescents who were diagnosed before age 12 years with gender dysphoria in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, found that those who experienced so-called

"affirmation" of their gender incongruent identities were more likely to persist in gender dysphoria. All four children who socially "transitioned" persisted in their gender dysphoria, while only 35% of the 123 children who did not completely socially "transition" persisted.[8]

- Another study reported from the University of Washington confirmed that children who had socially transitioned were unlikely to detransition. In the longitudinal Trans Youth Project, 317 youth between 3 and 12 years of age who had socially transitioned were followed for five years. "Most youth (94%) were living as binary transgender youth at the time of data analysis." "A small number of youth were living as cisgender youth (2.5%) or nonbinary youth (3.5%)."[9]
- In her final report, Cass stated, ***"However, those who had socially transitioned at an earlier age, and/or prior to being seen in clinic, were more likely to proceed to a medical pathway*** *[emphasis added]."*[10]

CONCLUSION

Social affirmation is an active intervention that contributes to the persistence of gender incongruence as well as gender dysphoria and leads to a much greater likelihood the child will go on to medical puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones and other harmful transgender interventions. Children should be allowed to progress through normal biological puberty while receiving appropriate counseling and mental health services, after which 80-90% of children will feel comfortable with their biological sex.

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